

How a Bill Becomes Law – Mini Simulation – Teresa Messing

This lesson would follow a discussion of the duties of the Legislative branch of Government. This is a kinesthetic/visual approach to teaching how a bill becomes law.

Grade Level: 8th - Class size: 30-32 students

Time Frame: 1 week or less depending on class schedule

Objectives:

Students will show an understanding of the processes involved in creating a Bill

Students will use collaboration skills to create an idea to present to the House

Students will identify key words; develop search strategies; locate appropriate and varied information sources; distinguish between primary and secondary sources

Student will use self reflection as a means of assessment

EALR's: Social Studies – 2.1 a, b, c; 3.1 a, b

NCSS Standards: VI, X

Accommodations: Students will work in small groups to accomplish a task. Peer tutoring/coaching will be utilized as well as pair/share reading.

Materials:

“We the People” curriculum materials*

CD – How a Bill Becomes Law*

Schoolhouse Rock video “I’m Just a Bill”

U.S. History Book

Guest Speaker

Assessment: Students will use a reflection sheet to assess their understanding.

Procedure:

1. Introduce vocabulary: initiative, amendment, caucus, constituent, lobbyist, majority, minority, bias, referendum, standing committee, Rules Committee, refer, veto, override, kill, Republican, Democrat, partisan, non-partisan. Have the students define and give a visual representation for each word.
2. Watch the Video, “How a Bill Becomes Law” (Schoolhouse Rocks) this will give a fun view of how a bill becomes law. The video is from the 70’s but puts the process in language that 8th graders can understand. It follows Bill as he becomes a federal law. Hollywood video did have this to rent. The city library may also have the video.
3. Using the CD provided by the Washington State Legislature take the students slowly through the process of how a Bill becomes a law in Washington State. This should be a question/answer session with the students.
4. Once the teacher feels comfortable that students show a basic understanding of the Bill process, have the students brainstorm, in small groups, ideas that they think would make good laws.
5. Have each group share some of their ideas with the rest of the class.
6. As a class, have the students vote on the top idea. Once that is done have students draw a role out of a hat: Governor, 8 Senators, 12 Representatives, 2 lobbyists, majority leader, minority leader, 12 caucus members/Rules Committee (suggest 7 majority/5 minority). Then have the students draw a paper that tells them if they are a Democrat or a Republican.
7. Share with the students that they will be creating a piece of legislation that they want to eventually become a law. Students will follow the steps that they have learned to make their idea a reality.
8. For this simulation the two lobbyists will be the ones that bring their idea to the legislator.

9. While the lobbyists are doing their thing (talking with House members, gaining support for the bill, etc.), the Governor, Senators, Representatives will be working on assignments that deal with their role. For instance, the governor would research the roles/responsibilities of being a governor. The senators/ reps would research their job and so on.
10. When the first reading of the legislation is introduced to the Floor all students would be involved in the floor discussion regardless of whether they were a Senator or a House member.
11. Committee.
12. Rules Committee.
13. Students would then break up into their caucuses and discuss the pros/cons of the Bill. Students would then have a second reading. Again, all students would be involved in this.
14. During the third reading students would all participate as if they were members of the House and give their final views and vote yeah or nay.
15. At this point, for time constraints, I may or may not have the students take the Bill through the Senate process. If the students are still not showing me a good understanding of the Bill process after the House has approved the Bill, I would probably have the lobbyists send the legislation to the Senate so that the students can go over the process again.
16. The Governor would then pass or veto the Bill. We would discuss, as a class, the pros/cons of the Governor's decision.
17. I would debrief/assess the students using the following questions:

Student Reflection:

1. What did you like best about this simulation? List three things
2. How could this simulation be improved? List at list one idea
3. List five things you learned about how a Bill becomes law
4. What was easy/difficult about this simulation?
5. Was there anything else the teacher should have done to help you understand how a bill becomes law?
6. When it comes to understanding the process for how a bill becomes law rate your level of understanding using a scale of one to five. One means I am very confused and need more help understanding the bill process. A 3 means I know pretty much how a bill becomes law but there are still a couple of things that I am confused about. A 5 means I got it and I am ready to take on Olympia and get my laws passed.
7. For those students who need more clarification, the teacher could meet with them in a small group while the rest of the class works on other assignments.

This would be a quick assessment of student participation/check for understanding as part of an ongoing assessment process during the course of the Civics unit.

*For information about the We the People program and materials, contact Kathy Hand, state coordinator, at (206) 244-3463 or see <http://www.civiced-wa.org/>

**A PowerPoint (on CD) on How a Bill Becomes a Law is available by contacting the Civic Education Coordinators at the Legislature: Joan Elgee, elgee.joan@leg.wa.gov or Judi Best, best.judi@leg.wa.gov.